

High-rises Seize Now the Sun

An Anthology of The HKBU Century Club Citywide English Poetry Competition (2018-2021)













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Foreword

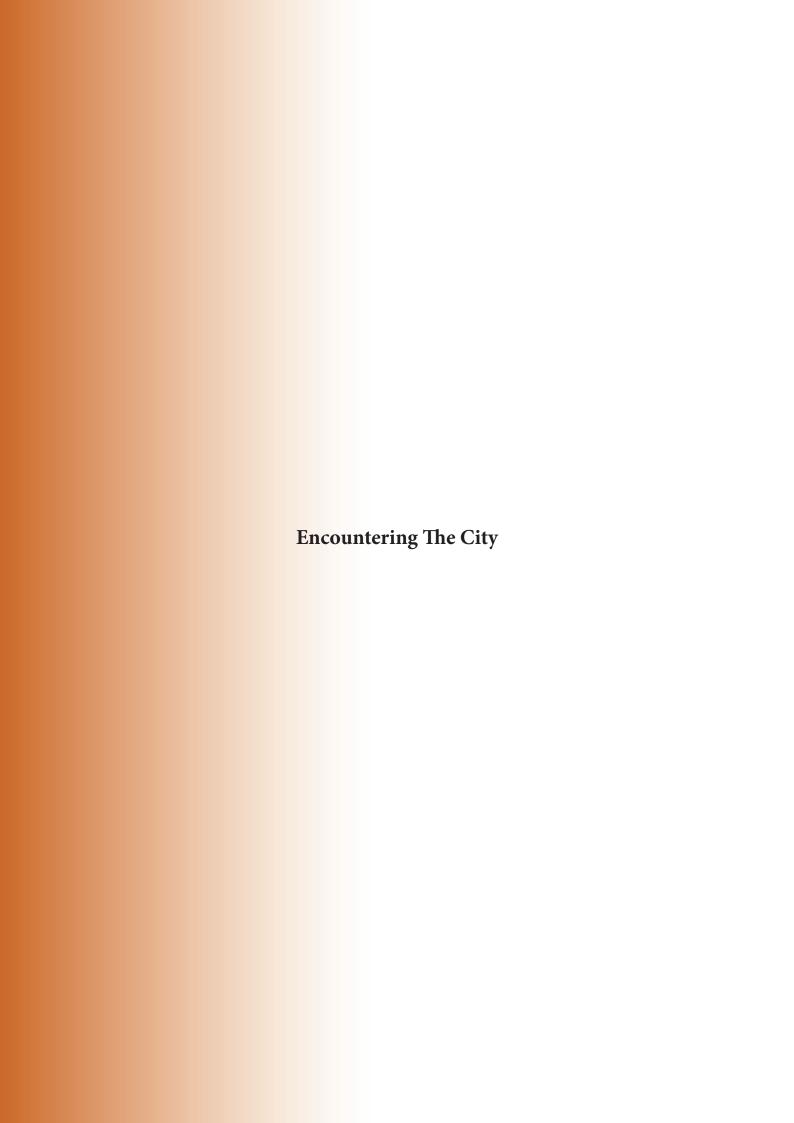
I have judged and been involved with a few literary competitions for emerging writers over the years, and I have never seen one—I doubt there could be one—where the writers, given license to write about anything, were so devoted to a single theme: the city where they live. Of the twenty-one poems collected here, all but a few take Hong Kong as setting or subject—typically both—and even the outliers bear traces of the city: an idiomatic Cantonese phrase, a particular relationship with water or food.

One of the vocations of poetry is to make sense of life in times of apparent chaos and great change. Presently, whatever one's political outlook or perspective on history and globalization, we may acknowledge that Hong Kong finds itself at a juncture that few cities ever have. The older generation will not bequeath to the younger the city they grew up in, not quite. And so the younger residents—so the young poets in this anthology—find themselves coming of age in an uncertain home. In the global imagination, Hong Kong has long been seen as a place that sits between East and West, between tradition and modernity—a *floating city according to Xi Xi's Marvels of a Floating City*. The young poets presented here understand as keenly as any previous generation what it means to hover between worlds in Hong Kong, so their poems are often inflected by a feeling of *love at last sight*, and a reaching into an unknown future for properly orienting symbols.

Yung Wing Chit's "Neon on Fabric, Wooden Hopp, 6 in." attempts to render an image of Hong Kong that at last becomes "limitless, distant". Lo Chun Hung's "A Walk in Victoria Harbour" seizes upon religious references, particularly the betrayal of Christ, to achieve its sense of a place balanced on a precipice. The idea of Hong Kong as an object of nostalgia and desire at once, able to inform the dreams of residents even from a distance, finds its way into poems such as Pang Hing Shun's "Moksha", a loving meditation on a grandmother who "sits on the sofa in Zhongshan, betting on the horse races in Hong Kong". And Stephanie Keung Wing's "Burdens", which depicts the daily routine and thoughts of a Hong Kong fruit seller, valorises simple, human dreams of the kind that hold up families, then communities, and then cities, regardless of the aims of rulers.

The poems collected here, as the title of the anthology suggests, are the runners-up and prize winners of the HKBU Century Club Citywide English Poetry Competition from the years 2018 to 2021. With the particular help of the HKBU Century Club, and my colleagues and co-organisers of the competition Mr James Shea and Dr Tammy Lai-Ming Ho, we publish these poems with the hope they might find readers within and beyond Hong Kong and give voice to a special chapter in the city's history. I have only been in Hong Kong a short time at the time of writing, and in that time I have been amazed at the energy and creativity of this city. That energy and creativity is discoverable in these poems.

Dr Patrick Gordon Holland Assistant Professor of Humanities & Creative Writing, Faculty of Arts, HKBU Poems & Artworks



neon on fabric, wooden hoop, 6 in.

Yung Wing Chit (Poly U)

i attempt to embroider a scene from a photo from nathan road from a time before. before tubes of gas broke apart, before the photo became an image, a streak on a pearl, a lone pearl on the shore.

i start with too much intention: what lights, what threads, what thickness of needle to puncture out a memory; how the backdrop should be black, no ghosts against the contrast of the sky; whether i should find my way through thousands of steps ago.

replanting a jungle of signs, i backtrack on stitches, second-guessing angles, the symbiosis of a japanese brand and a *cha lou*, in a frame of floss, suturing split ends, riding along cross-hatched traffic into the past.

it is at once vibrant—
the storm rinses neon on bricked roads,
draining colours into the underbelly of the cloth,
braided streams in my fingers, loose,
diverging on the bay,

a scatter of needlework supplies: i tug a piece of twine, wind around itself each knot a jewel, a mark on a micrograph colonising my heart, visualizing, from where i stand, a place intense, limitless, distant.

Moksha

Pang Hin Shun, Matthew (EdUHK)

After her death, Grandma still sits on the sofa in Zhongshan, betting on the horseraces in Hong Kong. The odds are still slim; her hands, reeking of mothballs, bone cold.

"A leaf flowing away from a boat, people separated by thousands of mountains." The Lion Rock spirit now crumbles in Weeping Hell.

Occasionally, the sunshine beams into others' kitchens to give hope. "Horses run their run. We dance our dance."

Music can never be taken for granted like clockwork.

Grandma, forgive me for not crying at your funeral. Death is still a myth half-hiding in a wave of numbness. It is not that I have Iron Stone Heart Intestines. I still miss our steamed chicken, the crabs

fried with ginger and scallion. The tongue is the worst organ to thumb back on guilt. I have been collecting Mother's tears with a small vase. I wait to see what grows from it.



Yu

Chan Wai Yu, Nikki (EdUHK)

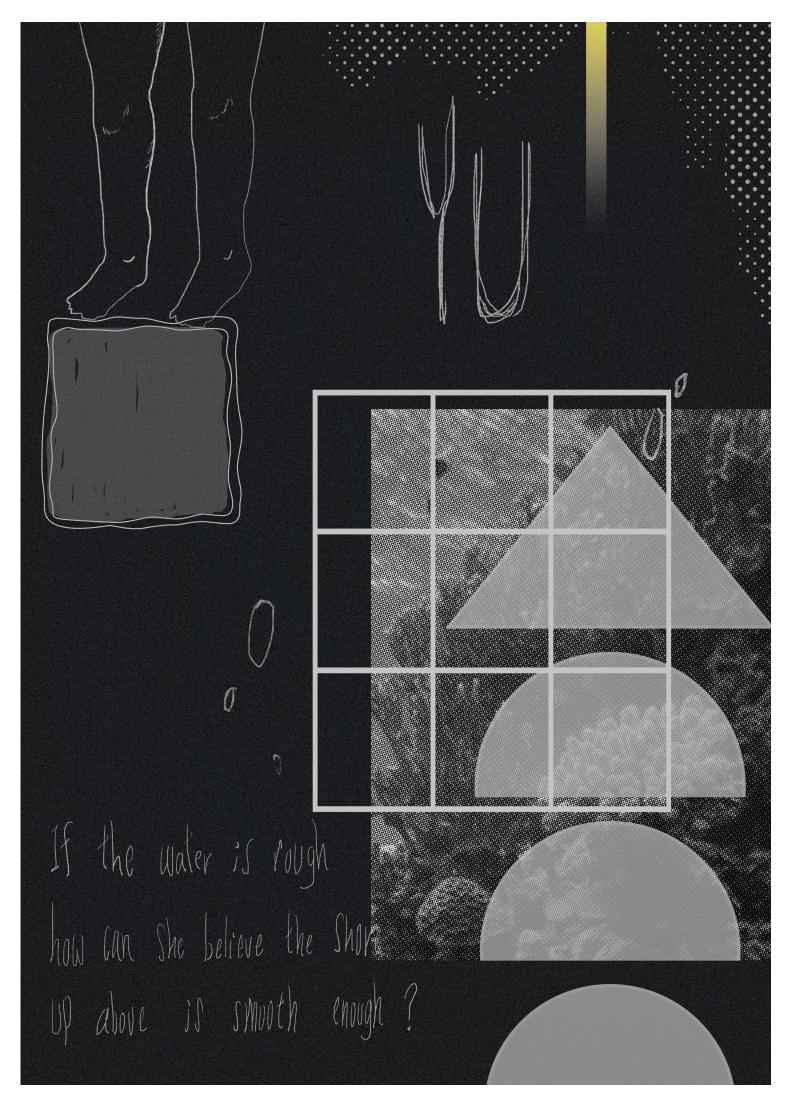
She made you
She gave you this name
Yu
so you believed you were
but only a species without fins

Do not give her that ray of light under the sea to deceive her that she's not trapped in this darkness and your perpetual puppetry

> Down there three is your eternity so she can still tickle your mind to keep your laughter and her manipulation going

To trick her back you carve this fish mask though you'd never win as you've already died the way that you have to be in disguise

If the water is rough how can she believe the shore up above is smooth enough?



Artwork by Zeng Chi Pang, Triple



Artwork by Wong Tsz Yan, Jasper

Ginger Milk Curd

Leung Fung Yee, Louise (HKU)

the ceiling fans are horns of cows wrestling in steel cages their rustle echoes with the horses on TV number 7 is lagging slightly behind as the middle-aged uncles holding holy texts start sweating onto their undershirts like faded mosaic tiles falling between red booths

I wave at the fo2 gei3 for some ginger milk curd he returns with a bowl, half-filled with milk and pours the hot ginger juice in

white silk misplaced on a yellow dancer made in Hong Kong; a compromise then the spicy smell snaps the silk away my sweetened milk usurped limbs dismantled, butchered hooves in the collision of fluids my double vision stands between the borders unable to let go of what I prefer

the teaspoon drops and sinks into the dirt below

the fo2 gei3 stares blind at the static TV and forgets to stop pouring yellow ginger into my white milk

Ginger milk curd is a traditional Chinese dessert made of ginger juice, buffalo milk and sugar.

Pedestal wall fans are commonly seen in old restaurants. They are referred to as 'cow horn fans' in Cantonese.

Fo2 Gei3 (伙記) can be translated to 'waiter'.

The horse race and the dancer imagery are references to Deng Xiao Ping's comment on Hong Kong's future post-Handover, 'horses continue to run and people continue to dance', implying that nothing major would change.

The Well of my Floating Life

Chiu Ka Man (City U)

There is no trace of the spider silk here
Only silent and never disturbing
The plump absorbed away from the light, precipitated the extremely black either
Deep in the unknown or surging
Squirming with a blinder
On the wall of the wellhead, moist to desire

Smallness putting me squeeze into the water
The breath feels the rhythm
Tension slowly narrows the distance of tower
The boundary of the sky is visible now?
blackest, wet waxy, desire shaking with soldier
A huge and well loaded gun held in the hand of a sniper

What a congenial gulp
Floating life is also soft
The rest of my force is swallowed by whales
Over my eyes, my mouth, my ears, my nose
Black fluid flowed out of my pupils
In this well of desire of creators

Fish

Ng Wing Yee, Janice (EdUHK)

Fish

Slap slap Ice cold surface Laving side by side The slimy scales reflect Us and our lust for the white flesh Not in the sense like *The Shape of Water* Oh God, how do you possibly fuck a fish? Another slap; pulling back my focus onto the halibuts. "MAI LEI GAN! Freshly fished today. Nothing fresher!" Rows of bulging fish eyes staring straight into my thoughts, Don't stare at me! I'm not the mastermind behind mass fishing. I'm not saying I don't feel guilty, we are after all the consumers; At least you aren't stuck in a dentist office, owned by a girl in pigtails. Here, you get a power-ranger lookalike, in her shiny apron and boots, Making smooth advances to whoever checking out her fishy business. If someone were to conquer an apocalypse, it would be one of these ladies. All around me, women are shouting monotonously at the top of their lungs, Maybe this is a contest, maybe the winner gets praise from their husband. "I WANT ONE THAT IS STILL MOVING, BUT IT HAS TO BE DEAD." "HEY, GIVE ME ANOTHER ONE, THIS IS ROTTEN AS HELL." "I DON'T LIKE THIS, WHY DOES IT SMELL LIKE FISH?" Ladies, why don't you give that poor fish a chance and give it Its honorable credits for dying with its eyes still wide open? Wait, do fish have eyelids? Did Nemo blink at all? Do they... Missing completely what was unfolding behind my back, A woman's arm sinuously makes its way to the wet counter Her index finger clearly knowing its final destination, She reaches out for a poke. A poke on the belly, A poke on the fin, and, a poke on the eye? I give her way to let her work her magic. Please, I do not wish to interfere. And please, do not touch me. I smile at the owner, used my Sweet sweet tone, Cleared my Throat, I said. "Excuse me, How much for one?" She looks at me puzzled, Like I just asked to buy a house "Which one? Make up your mind." Knowing nothing about fish, trying my best Not to offend, I said, the cheapest one please? She gives me a look, finds a dreary-looking one, Puts it in the red tinted plastic bag, "Twenty-two." Oh no, I am twenty-one, looks deceive, how funny.

"IT'S TWENTY TWO DOLLARS,

LENG NUI!"



How to Make a Mixed Baby

Gloria Chioma Onuoha (EdUHK)

Prep time: 9 months

Cook time: For eternity, or until it dies

Servings: Serves you and your spouse indefinitely

Ingredients:

5 tbsp of Christianity
A slice of an overworked mother
A squeeze of lemon
1 mid-sized apartment
A dash of a neglectful father
A pinch of curly hair

Instructions:

- 1. Mother should drink this soup daily till the baby appears 9 months later.
- 2. Don't act surprised when it turns out to be a girl.
- 3. Pour the child into a school (the international type, the chase-your-dreams-but-don't-wander-too-far type).
- 4. Place over a Christian guilt stove. Proceed to whip until steam cries out of the soup.
- 5. Make sure to spot for bits of scrumptious creativity and pluck out to not spoil the child.
- 6. Squash pieces of defiance to make the soup finer, more submissive to taste (according to preference).
- 7. Serve in a jar. Close the lid and place it on a shelf until it starts to bloom.
- 8. When the smell starts to permeate the house, throw the jar out the door and hear its glassy innocence shatter into pieces.
- 9. Lock the door. Ignore (even when you hear sobbing).
- 10. Forget, rewind, walk out the door into shards of glass and now you're bleeding.



An Ordinary Girl in Hong Kong

Choi Sin Yi, Peggie (HKU)

How do we spell "astronaut"?
Asks a mother to her 6-year-old daughter.
The little girl looks at her shoes, red cheeks hot.
With an empty brain, she prepares herself for the slaughter.

Now a 12-year-old, Looking down the endless list of boring homework, Her heart sinks cold, But burns again as she conjures up a figure of a poor clerk.

In dramas, 15 years old is an age for first kisses, She is alone everyday working on her tasks until mid-night, Worrying about the deadline she misses, Wondering if she is living a teenage life right.

Think she can finally be free at 20?
That the obstacles are cleared, and that happiness is near?
Stop taking life as a joke and live seriously!
Study like a slave in order to achieve a perfect career.

There is no need to mention her work life. Everyone knows it's just the same story. Sometimes she imagines finding a knife To end this ridiculous joke gracefully.

What is life and what is death?
Patients who are conscious but unable to move,
A badly injured soldier struggling for breath,
A girl who is hopeless and ready to stand on the roof.

If there is one thing that she feels sorry about herself, Is having been born as a human being on Earth. She asks why and begs God for help. God says it is her life task to find her own worth.

She hopes she will find the answer before her last breath. But perhaps her story would be different if she was born in Finland instead.

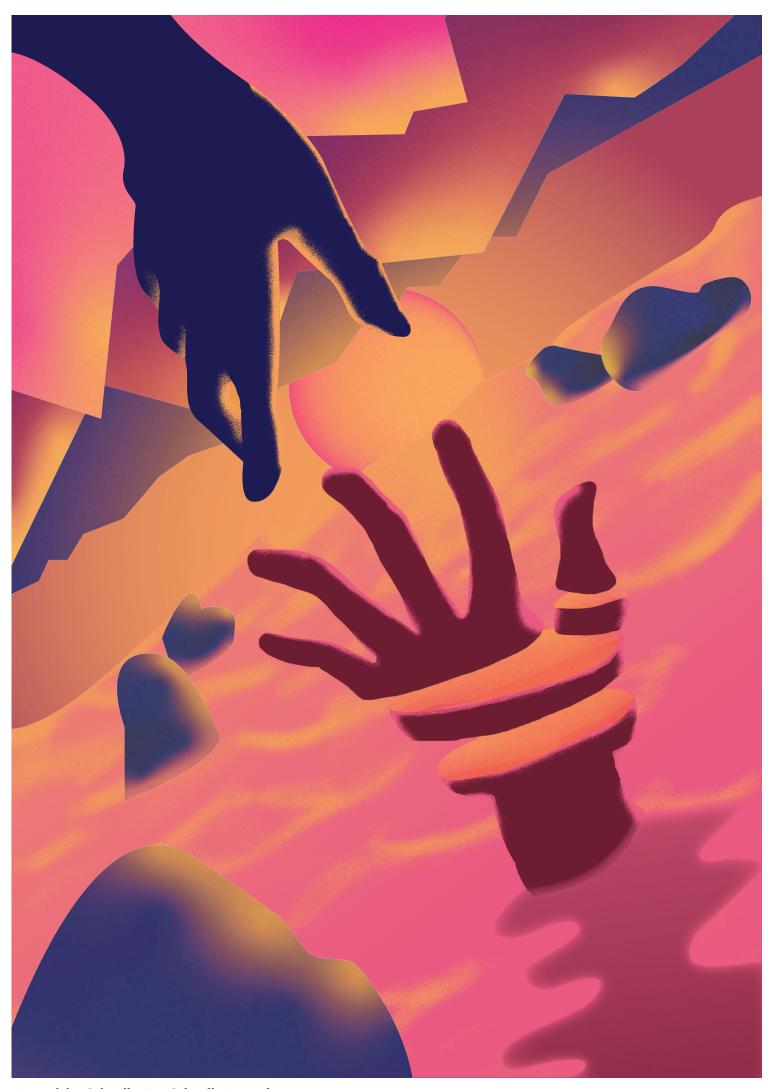
Bring Me Anywhere

Chan Chong Yan (HKU)

Bring me anywhere – I'd take your lift You'd speed past the wet blur of streets Forgetting how I projected my youth on you With our hands clasped and steps slowed on some boulevard Where the lights never turned green.

Bring me anywhere – I'd take your lift You promised me tangerine sunsets That only turned into some 6 pms And like dusk, we kiss the edges of history Not knowing how the night befalls as love wanes.

Bring me anywhere – I'd take your lift You've spent your life frequenting the heartbreak hotel Tailing dreams that confused themselves as memories But kept all the exits to yourself To save me the room keys she left you.



Artwork by Gabrielle, Bas Gabrielle Arimado

What Happened Between us in Kathmandu

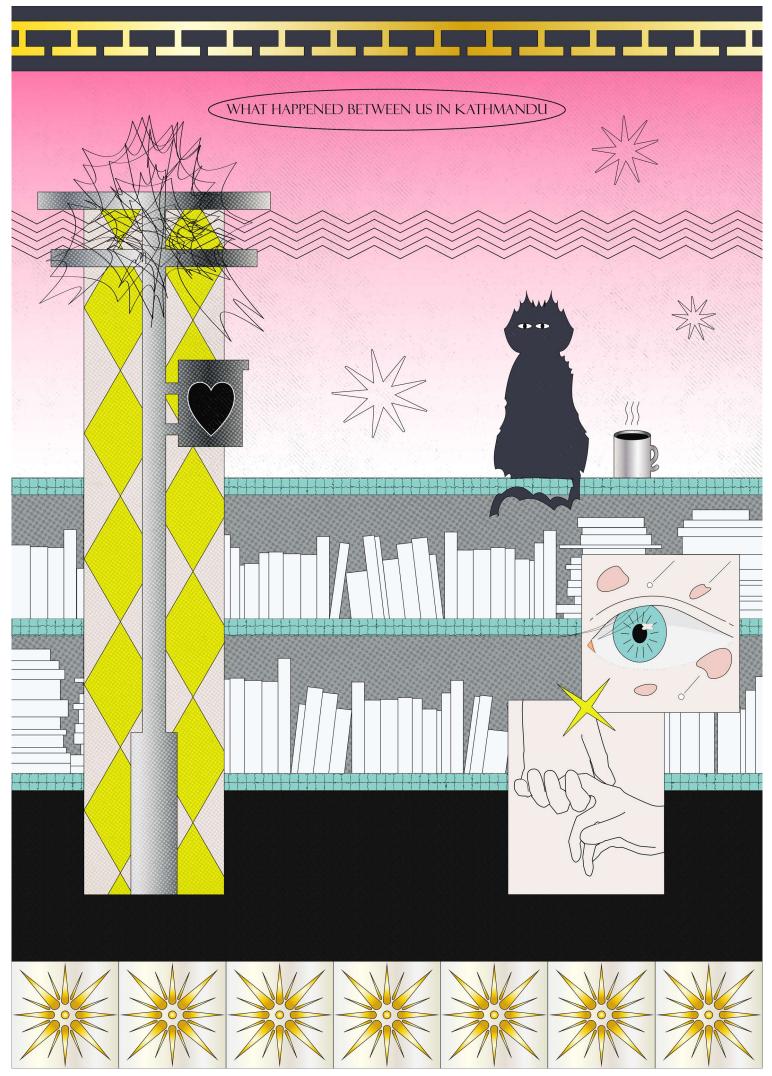
Sharon Rai (HKU)

Birds fly out in a single file before parting into two
Cars speed on the road with a desperate desire to leave
The noise of the friction mixes with the calls of the bus conductors
While street vendors call attention to their goods
Conversations are taking place all around us
And I am taken with the silence between us

The table dividing us vanishes as my ears pick up
Sound waves that recall intoxicated memories
And I laugh in return as though you are slipping liquor
Into this bowl of unappetising mushroom soup
In truth, you have asked for an ashtray and slipped a cigarette
Between your lips that break into peals of laughter and sip iced milk tea

I am now intrigued by the possibility of holding your hand But I stay silent as you lead me into a bookstore Away from tourist spots to an ordinary street of fumes and dust My eyes sweep the store for books that will form my collection And rest upon the gleam in your eyes that express interest in *fonts* Your excited smile is engraved into the alleys of my mind

Traversing footbridges crowded with old ladies in faded saris
Passing by street stores squeezed under like a cupboard
Motorbikes after motorbikes, micros after micros, foreign streets that
I will remember by your voice and gestures and jokes between us
Snaps of ivory pillars, bad makeup stores and one unwanted taxi ride later,
This grimy city's streets and alleys have changed forever



Artwork by Huang Wa Yi, Alistar

Mummy Dearest

Sky Clarke (EdUHK)

Do you think that marrying a white man gives you a sense of purpose and authority, a way of justifying to this city, *I am worthy, and I belong here*?

Do you look at my olive complexion and wonder if you could peel back my skin to reveal a whiter flesh inside?

And the brown eyes instead of green.

Do you blame Dad for the impotency of his whiteness, how it was your last defence against disapproval, how it never quite penetrated the milky mirrors of those flashing opalescent stones you coveted lined high along those glassy pristine corridors or do you blame yourself when you realised Dad's pockets didn't go that deep?

You're usually such a stickler for cleanliness and order, but do you remember when Michelle, came over, with hair like golden silk and honey-kissed freckles, when she spilt milk on our tablecloth and you fussed and grinned, but didn't bother cleaning up the whiteness that kept seeping slowly into the hardwood beneath.

Computer Processing

Emily Hedvig Olsson (CUHK)

Churning through, a computer munches on his possibilities, cracking them gently between his teeth, as he goes through them, chip by chip.

Some crack through, and the taste of microplastics, salty with a dash of salmon, festers like a sore between the lips.

He licks at it, disgruntled,

and resumes munching on the chips.

Tapping them against his teeth when it rings hollow.

Sniffing them on occasions when brine seems to marinate within. He swirls them around with his tongue to be sure.

He's sure. He's not sure.

On the tip of his tongue, he weighs a chip and clicks his cords, key by key on the console, typing the chip's code, "B r u t e f o r c e" into the search engine.

Flummoxed, he stares wide-eyed at refuse trucks driving over control panels, at CPUs being stripped bare

from their bones,

and he spits out the chip, and munches on another.

We Took

Raisa Sheikh (EdUHK)

We took too much for granted, we walked this Earth like kings, We didn't see the disaster that our ignorance would bring. We took the things we wanted, and things we didn't need, We didn't heed the warning; we didn't stop the greed. We took too many journeys, no matter what the price, We used oil like water, the air choked on our vice. We took the plastic from our homes and dropped it in the sea, We didn't see the damage, or hear the oceans plea. We didn't take it seriously, we lost our way somehow, And when we look for who to blame, lets all please take a bow. We ignored all the warning signs; we took too long to care. We took and took and took, Until there was nothing left to share. We were told to social distance like it was something strange and new, But ignoring our fellow humans, isn't that what we always do? We took the news like children being told they couldn't play, We took it with a pinch of salt and went out anyway. We took our masks off in the street, it didn't seem the place. This air we thought so little off, was now our saving grace. We took our lives for granted and we lost all self-respect, It took the power of a virus, to showcase our neglect. So, when this is finally over, will we all look back and learn, Will we take the warnings we've been given or watch our planet burn?

Yellow Stains on Your Chinese Blue

Chow Yue Ching, Felix (HKU)

It is impolite to wake the dying, silvery *maotai* on their lips. You were taught to love the old. They love *Mao*, and vote blue. Can you love them still?

Too yellow for your Chinese skin. Said yeh yeh chopping peppercorns, their scent a reminder of the birds teargassed to bits.

Your Chineseness is a broken traffic light, the spraypaint a new bloodline. *Yellow your skin*, *yellow your heart. Yellow your ribbon too?*

That day, you were 'dreaming'. To your father's face you lied, his gaze a meteorite. *Be filial!* Same hall you first kissed Anna in is a sleet of beanbag rounds.

How are you supposed to feel when a twelve-year-old hands you a brick? We fall in place for our daily bread, cameras as our altar boys. *Oh, did you hear his name?*

You locked your dreams in a ziplock bag, far away from your Chinese eyes. Masks pressed on curb, bloodstains rich as your mother's love.

You look at the full-face mask again—So *Huangdi's child*, how do you explain that cockroaches, too, have dreams?



Artwork by Ng Yuk Tsang, Albert



The Last Night Before Lunar New Year

Liang Yanfeng (HKBU)

A cockroach moved like a spirit up through the gap of the water pipe. She picked up a slipper to slap it. Warming leftovers in the microwave, she laid an empty bowl on the opposite side, ladling out a bowl of borsch, with glasses misted over. She chewed a slab of dumplings: casting her eyes upon the dinner table: a warm white bulb flickering, a faint light stayed in a shabby photo. Water dripped from a rusty shower. She laid on the cold ground, watching the snow of television, feeling the night's temperature before the new year.

Yes

Yang Linglin (HKBU)

I stood, beside a lamppost.²
A puddle two puddles and three puddles.
Orange light lived in the puddles and stood with me.³
¿Evole sis tahwt
You said I do not love you.⁵

"They say Hong Kong has a serious issue of light pollution."
"Taxi drivers are having a hard time,"
"they all work at night, listen,"
"a red taxi, a man with a thermos bottle,"
"they just passed me, now."

Salt, still, sought.
Cream, closer, corrupt.
I thought I loved you,
But you said they just words. Words, weapon, wherein.

.Evole sis tahwt Seeing you or looking at you.⁴ Sitting next to you or holding you.⁸ Asking you or listening you, sis evole Yes.

I remember the night we walked, and walked, and walked. I remember the nights we walked, and walked, and walked. Meanwhile we talked.⁷ Unable, unveil, unless⁶ 27184536.

In Memory of My Grandmother

Ko I Lam, Elaine (HKBU)

She surrendered to slumber, she's quiescent she's a serene glass cube laying in arboretum The plastic timepiece is a big round plate too eager to play the moon her skin too fragile and barren to carry its weight. She's a white rose whose thorns are dripping needles, she's a stiff log decorated by dingy damask She's a morning glory, mourning she's a broken trumpet as seeds are playing harps in her throat popping firecrackers and pills bottles exposing red fountain, she's the testimony destroyed she's a bellflower she's the ballerina who never returns from the abyss. When the kerosene lamp vomits dead skin on the rim blooming thistles, sprouting their corroding roots under the petals of dried orchid twisted and curled she's an old addict's mouth longs for her past mother's breast milk. Red poppies douse the dandelions fanning out in her pupils She's the eager eyes that search for hospital bleach for the poker she loves that Big 2 game slippers whose feet could be at a singing window or at the wet market with a bamboo basket with mah-jong with Shanghai noodles white clover And when the sky meets the horizon she's the dream of kissing that distant flower distant earth.

A Walk Near the Victoria Harbour

Lo Chun Hung, Christopher (EdUHK)

Sprouting, daffodils from the warm soil, shining through high-rises is the sun.

Rushing, believers to the Ka'bah, exerting themselves for the Jannah they seek.

Words be saved for the Eucalyptus tree.

I rise amid the daffodils surrounding me and witness the anguished sun.

Monks shall emerge from their temples and beg for food.

Monks must emerge from their temples and beg for food.

No meditation is necessary you have no time.

No meditation is necessary you mustn't have time.

Fortune to monks owning a temple.

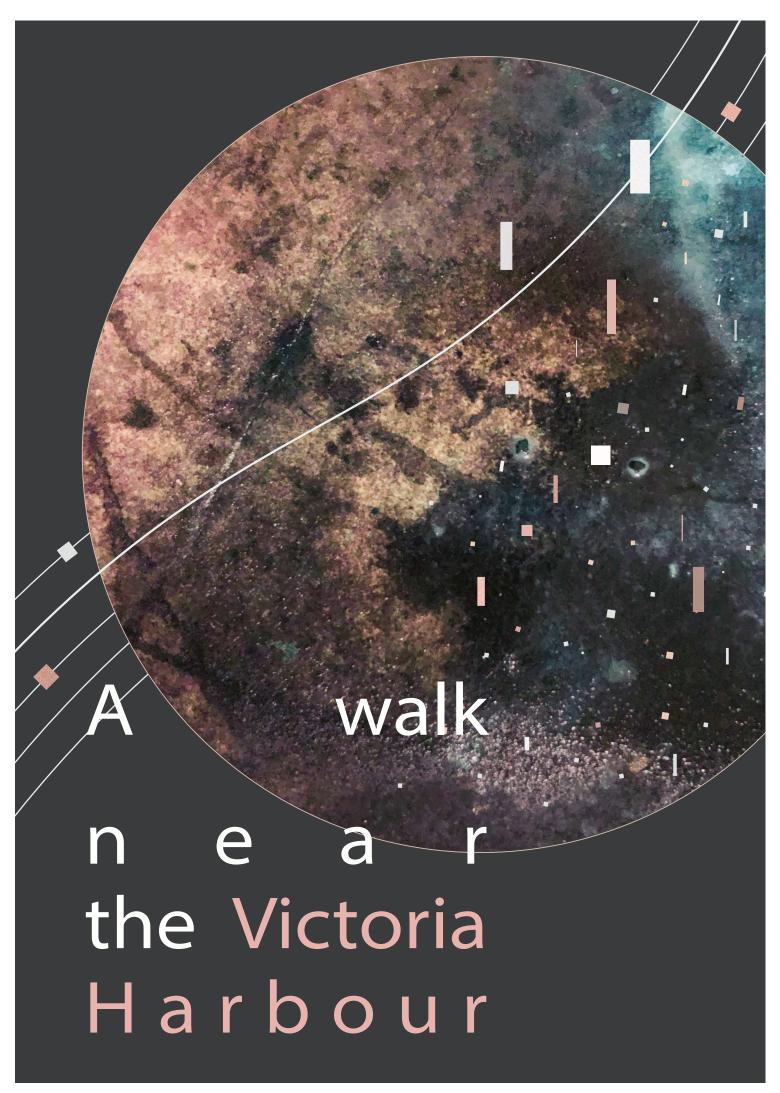
Misfortune to monks seeking no refuge.

Since the dusk is approaching.

I drag myself to a mesmerising park. Listen to my Liebesträume not Erlkönig. High-rises seize now the sun, extinguished.

Judas, (Peter, embrace come, and us. Disparage call, before not **Judas** the thirty crowing pieces of of their silver. roaster.)

Should I return, for I have the sun to tend to. There is no fruit In the Victoria Harbour I can find anyway.



Burdens

Stephanie Keung Wing (EdUHK)

"Come buy, come buy." The fruit seller shouted relentlessly. "埋嚟睇,埋嚟揀."

The possible buyers were Shoving and pushing To get a glimpse of his baskets.

That sat bashfully:

- 1. Oranges unsweetened; out of juice
- 2. A father's duty & Sam's tuition
- 3. Begrudging 120sq ft. mortgage
- 4. To spend money like dirt
- 5. Prescription pills waiting dutifully
- 6. Electric fan, plumbing fee, new shoes, new-
- 7. Guilty cherries not in season
- 8. Virgin flowers for a frustrated wife
- 9. Frugal hope growing dimmer
- 10. Retirement
- 11. Child. Proud. Wife. Happy.
- 12. A good night's sleep

List of Winners and Finalists

2019 (adjudicated by international guest judge, Sarah Howe)

First Prize, Lian Yanfeng (HKBU): *The Last Night Before Lunar New Year*Second Prize, Sky Clarke (EdUHK): *Mummy Dearest*Third Prize, By Ng Wing Yee, Janice (EdUHK): *Fish*First Runner-Up, Ko I Lam, Elaine (HKBU): *In Memory of My Grandmother*Second Runner-Up, Pang Hin Shun, Matthew (EdUHK): *Moksha*Third Runner-Up, Chan Wai Yu, Nikki (EdUHK): *Defining You*

2020 (adjudicated by guest international judge, Srikanth Reddy)

First Prize, Chow Yue Ching, Felix (HKU): Yellow Stains on Your Chinese Blue
Second Prize, Gloria Chioma Onuoha (EdUHK): How to Make a Mixed Baby
Third Prize, Sharon Rai (HKU): What happened between us in Kathmandu
First Runner-Up, Chan Wai Yu, Nikki (EdUHK): Yu
Second Runner-Up, Lo Chun Hung, Christopher (EdUHK): A walk near the Victoria Harbour
Third Runner-Up, Chan Chong Yan (HKU): Bring Me Anywhere
Fourth Runner-Up, Chu Charmaine Antonia (HKBU): To The Waters

2021 (adjudicated by guest international judge, Eunice Andrada)

First Place, Yung Wing Chit (PolyU): neon on fabric, wooden hoop, 6 in.

Second Place, Leung Fung Yee, Louise (HKU): Ginger Milk Curd

Third Place, Yang Linglin (HKBU): Yes

First Runner-up, Keung Wing, Stephanie (EdUHK): Burdens

Second Runner-up, Raisa Sheikh (EdUHK): We took

Third Runner-up, Chon Sin Yi, Peggie (HKU): An Ordinary Girl in Hong Kong

Fourth Runner-up, Chiu Ka Man (CityU): The well of my floating life

Fifth Runner-up, Emily Hedvig Olsson (CUHK): Computer Processing

Acknowledgements

This anthology is made possible by the special contributions of the HKBU Century Club, Chris Song and the Hong Kong Poetry Festival Foundation, the HKBU Department of English, the HKBU Department of Humanities & Creative Writing and the International Writers Workshop. The organisers of the HKBU Century Club Citywide English Poetry Competition would also like to thank the guest international judges who adjudicated the competition from 2018 to 2021, Sarah Howe, Srikanth Reddy, and Eunice Andrada.















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